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Full-Day Kindergarten

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

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PRESCHOOL MATTERS

Measuring a school's progress is about as important as measuring a child's progress in it. Knowing when a school is making progress is not a simple matter—at least not as simple as the high-stakes testing system used by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) would have us believe. That law requires reporting of standardized tests administered yearly in grades 3 through 8 in order to measure the progress the schools are making. This is a problem because it does not establish a suitable point of reference for measuring how schools are doing.

Gauging progress with NCLB's one-size-fits-all testing system is like posting a judge at the finish line at a race in which not all runners

begin from the same starting point. School A's runners may all cross the finish line in good order while School B, whose runners began from points farther away, has some who don't quite make it. Establishing mean proficiency by posting the judge at the finish line doesn't paint a true picture of how far the two schools are bringing their runners. Though School A's runners all finish, it could be that School B is actually taking its runners farther when we consider the points from which they started.

Even if the judge stands at the finish line each year, she still doesn't learn enough to make an informed judgment because each group of runners is different each year. This point is not lost on the Uni-

versity of Michigan's Steven W. Raudenbush. (See the *Newsmaker* interview on page 11.) A nationally recognized expert on assessment in social settings, Raudenbush makes—and amply supports with scientific evidence—the point that NCLB's testing approach is unfair in a paper he wrote for the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

Establishing mean proficiency as a measure of school progress is, concludes the report “scientifically indefensible.” Raudenbush hits the nail on the head when he says, “To reward schools for high mean achievement is tantamount to rewarding those schools for serving students who were doing well prior to school entry.” In other words, it's like rewarding schools whose students are closer to the finish line at the outset.

This doesn't mean we stop standardized testing when evaluating school performance. What it does mean is that there is no easy *and correct* answer. This point is illustrated by a key finding from the study: In grades K–1, average rates of academic learning in high- and low-poverty schools were similar in mathematics and only slightly different in reading. This, despite the fact that larger differences occur between the two types of schools in mean proficiency, as measured by standardized

tests.

Raudenbush also examined the “value added” approach to evaluating school performance. This method relies on gathering non-test evidence from classrooms. While he found problems there as well, the value-added approach tended to be more reliable than mean proficiency at schools where there was a high proportion of disadvantaged students. As might be expected, schools with higher populations of advantaged students were less favored by value-added evaluation.

Looking at what schools actually do with students, which the value-added approach does, should be part of any truly useful approach to measuring school performance. We are guardedly hopeful that new Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has signaled a willingness to revisit some aspects of NCLB's approach to high stakes testing as a measure of school performance. To be sure, more information has to flow into the system if it is going to be viable. It is in all our best interests to see that NCLB succeeds.

W. Steven Barnett
Director, NIEER

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New Turning Point for Public Pre-K? New State Investments in Early Ed

New Mexico Launches New Initiative, Tennessee Inches Closer, Others Expand;
State Legislators See Power of Early Ed to Lift All Students' Achievement

With big state budget deficits still looming, Medicaid costs on the rise and state revenues from an anemic economic recovery only trickling in, no one expected the 2005 legislative session to be a particularly positive one for public preschool.

But it was.

New Mexico came first, with a hard-won victory, championed by Governor Bill Richardson and Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish. On April 5, the governor signed a new law creating new early childhood education programs for 1,400

children. "Every child deserves a chance to succeed in life," Richardson said.

The \$5 million effort will serve 4-year-olds in both public schools and community-based centers across the state, an approach now used widely in public preschool programs. "An effective pre-K program is made up of all kinds of community partners," said Lt. Governor Denish.

Even as the ink was drying in New Mexico, other states forged ahead with their own new and expanded programs. Most notably,

Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen kept the heat on lawmakers in his state, despite a tough budget and strong resistance from some legislators. Bredesen proposed using \$25 million in state lottery funds to finance the first leg of an ambitious program to expand an existing effort that serves both 3- and 4-year-olds.

His plan held the kernels of a more comprehensive early education effort, to be run by a new state Office of Early Learning, within the state's education department. He also called for a new

scholarship program to support teachers seeking certification in early education, noting that certified teachers are key to achieving quality instruction. "Early childhood education really is a good investment for the state, and we are glad it is being given a priority this year," said Kim Karesh, spokeswoman for the state education department.

Bredesen faced rough sledding in the media and state legislature, however. A group of state legislators challenged the Governor's right to use state lottery funds for early education. They contended the funds were earmarked for higher education and should be used only for college scholarships. Other lawmakers and grassroots groups raised an even more potent objection, saying rising Medicaid costs—known as TennCare in that state—made pre-K expansion unaffordable. Some charged the Governor could only pay for the new pre-K program at the expense of children's health insurance.

But Bredesen remained unruffled, pushing the pre-K proposal toward what appeared to be a likely victory as *Preschool Matters* went to press. "The governor believes lottery funds can be used for any level of education, including preschool," said his spokeswoman. "And no child or adult will lose

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As New Mexico and Iowa move forward with expansion of state-funded pre-K, Tennessee, Arkansas and Massachusetts move closer to universal pre-K.

New Study: Quality Still an Issue with State Prekindergarten Programs

Long-Awaited Six-State Study of 240 Programs Reveals Need for Improvement

Four years ago, leading scientists at three of the nation's most widely-respected universities joined together to investigate the quality and impact of state-sponsored prekindergarten efforts. Educators, policymakers and advocates eagerly followed the study, which promised to measure the progress both children and programs were making.

The scientists put together a sample of 1,000 children attending 240 programs in six states, including Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky and Ohio

as well as parts of California and New York. They observed classroom practices, interviewed teachers, parents and administrators and used standard assessment tools to measure children's progress and skills.

This spring, when they reported their first results in *Early Developments*, the highly regarded quarterly published by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, they made an unusual confession. "We wish that we could report that state-funded pre-K programs are uniformly of high quality with exemplary classroom practices," the authors reported. "Unfortunately, this is not the story we tell in this issue."

Instead, they found only modest gains for children and far-from-exemplary classrooms. Many teachers failed to help children make significant gains in literacy or math. Most distressing of all, children most at risk of school failure tended to have the least qualified teachers. "It is quite possible" that the lack of high-quality instruction "may contribute to

the persistent gaps in achievement that are evident as children enter kindergarten," concluded Oscar Barbarin, professor at the University of North Carolina and a lead investigator.

Half-day programs, some lasting less than three hours, compounded the problem. Transitions at arrival and departure, snack and outdoor play meant that children spend "relatively large amounts of time waiting, and with little contact with an adult," the researchers said. "Much of the children's time is spent with no learning activity going on." Routines like standing in line, cleaning up and washing hands, together with meals and snacks, account for more than one-third of the time and teacher-child interactions were minimal during routines.

The findings were disappointing in light of the fact that most programs met the structural standards known to be associated with quality, such as relatively high staff-to-child ratios and small group sizes. The scientists examined an extraordinary diversity in settings, teachers and length of the day. Included were public school classrooms, Head Start programs and private centers. This mirrors the widely differing starting points at which children enter public pre-K and may partly explain the poor results.

Richard Clifford, co-director

of the National Center for Early Development and Learning, predicts that, in the future, choices will be made about the best model for instruction, blending activities that are teacher-led and child-centered, to enhance learning and development. "Eventually, public school will begin for most children at age three or four," he says.

Still, the researchers found hope and guidance in the results. "Children made small but meaningful gains from the fall to the spring of their pre-K year," says Carolee Howes from the University of California. "Pre-K experiences stopped children's academic declines and even helped them catch up a bit." She pointed to evidence that children made some progress in naming letters and colors and counting. "Imagine what we could do if all programs were of high quality."

The scientists plan to release more than a dozen papers based on their findings in the coming months, with the goal of giving policymakers and educators concrete ideas on how to improve instruction and learning in pre-K classrooms. For more information, visit www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/pdfs/ed9_1.pdf. ■



Full-Day K? Better for Kids and Families, States Still Debate How to Get it Done

Quality and Cost of Full-Day Kindergarten Biggest Obstacles for Legislators and Policymakers as Families Struggle On

Only 60 percent of America's kindergartners attend full-day programs, even though the scientific evidence and the needs of working families make it obvious that a longer school day benefits both children and families.

"Policymakers around the nation are taking a closer look at the value of full-day kindergarten," says Steve Barnett, NIEER's director and co-author of a new report looking at the benefits of full-day and half-day schedules. "The preliminary evidence suggests that, if done right, most children could benefit from a longer day, with more learning opportunities."

Barnett and NIEER research associate Debra Ackerman draw that conclusion in a new NIEER policy brief, "Making the Most of Kindergarten: Present Trends and Future Issues in the Provision of Full-day Programs." The new paper, which reviews the literature on the subject, suggests both the need for more research and the need for more action to be certain that children get the most benefit from the time they spend in kindergarten classes.

Full-day kindergarten, which is defined as anywhere from 4.5 to 6 hours in length, is permitted in every state. Twenty-nine of the 50 states provide additional funding to make it happen, but only nine actually require school districts to get full-day

kindergarten up and running. (See chart) As a result, the decision to have half-day or full-day kindergarten is mostly a local one. Not surprisingly, neighboring districts and towns make different decisions about what to do. The lowest incidence of full-day kindergarten is in the Northeast.

Children living in southern states have the broadest access to full-day kindergarten, since eight of the nine states requiring full-day programs are in the South.

Why does it matter?

Two big reasons, according to the research. First of all, a high-quality kindergarten experience can boost children's academic and social skills. Studies show, in particular, that a longer day affords children more total minutes every day in self-directed, hands-on learning—the kind of activities that are associated with big gains in life-long academic achievement. "Results are somewhat mixed, but they generally indicate that full-day programs outshine half-day programs," says Ackerman.

Second, a full-day kindergarten program better supports working parents and their children. Such programs not only save families money, but also cut down on disruptive logistics for both children and their families.

Enrollment in full-day programs has grown steadily since 1969, when only 11 percent of American kinder-

gartners went to school for a full school day. Low-income children are most likely to attend full-day K. About 69 percent of low-income public schools offer the longer day. Minority children are also more likely to be in a full-day program. About 76 percent of the nation's public schools with at least 75 percent minority enrollment offer a full-day program.

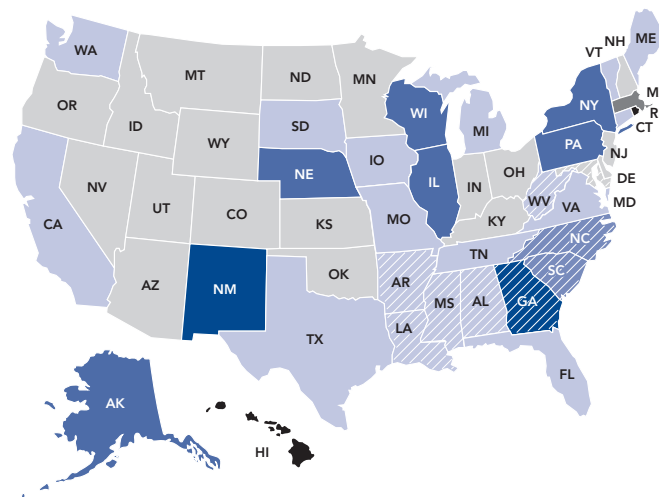
Even so, many states have resisted requiring full-day K, for several reasons. First, there is the question of cost. With school budgets under

pressure virtually everywhere, public officials are loath to seek more funding to extend the half-day programs.

Still, the scientists found many questions have yet to be answered. To date, there are no randomized studies of full-day versus half-day services, which makes the research less conclusive than it might otherwise be. Considering the higher costs of a longer day, more research is needed. For more information, visit <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=118>. ■

State Funding for Full-Day Kindergarten

The states that are shaded blue provide financial incentives to encourage local districts to offer full-day kindergarten programs, with the states shaded darkest offering the greatest incentives. The nine states that require districts to offer full-day kindergarten are cross-hatched.



- Full-day funding levels are greater than both Grade 1 & half-day funding
- Full-day funding levels equal Grade 1 funding & are greater than half-day funding
- All Kindergarten funding levels are greater than Grade 1 funding
- All Kindergarten funding levels equal Grade 1 funding
- Full-day funding levels are greater than half-day funding, but less than Grade 1
- All Kindergarten funding is less than Grade 1 funding
- Hawaii's schools are not separated into school districts and there is therefore no traditional funding formula; Rhode Island bases district funding on amounts received in fiscal year 1997-1998

Massachusetts: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?

In mid-March, Massachusetts took another giant step toward statewide, universal public preschool, when Governor Mitt Romney chose nine distinguished Massachusetts leaders to head the newly-created Department of Early Education and Care.

The new appointees bring a range of experience and expertise to the new department, from the world of higher education, early education, mental health and business. Perhaps most critical of all, the state's education and human services officials

will collaborate in leading the new effort—a sign of cooperation lacking in many other states. “This is a great day for the children and families of Massachusetts,” said Margaret Blood, architect of the statewide Early Education for All campaign that led the fight to win public preschool for all the state's 3- and 4-year-olds.

The launch of the new department came on the heels of the February 15 Massachusetts Supreme Court decision not to follow the recommendation of a lower court judge who called for public preschool to help close the achievement gap in several of the state's most impoverished districts. The Supreme Court acknowledged the state had yet to

meet the goals of education reform, but said the state was making steady headway and should be given more time. “The decision was disappointing, but it did hold some good news for us as well,” says Amy Kershaw, communications director for the campaign. “The court did not dismiss the preschool claim. The justices just said they were reluctant to take a more activist role now, while the state was making progress.” Thus, Kershaw adds, “it's possible the court may uphold the recommendation for preschool later on, if progress stalls.” To learn more about the new department of early education in Massachusetts, visit www.earlyeducationforall.org. ■



Deficits Don't Deter: Governors Invest in Pre-K, Child Care

Three governors were designated “Pre-K Budget Heroes” by advocacy organization Pre-K Now in its just-released report *Leadership Matters: Governors' Pre-K Proposals Fiscal Year 2006*. Despite confronting budgetary crises in their states, Connecticut Governor Jodi Rell (R), Washington Governor Christine Gregoire (D) and Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich (D) have scraped together substantial budget increases for pre-K programs in their states.

Though each faces a deficit of at least \$1 billion, Rell managed a 20 percent increase

for the Connecticut School Readiness Initiative, Gregoire was able to budget a 28 percent proposed increase over two years for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Plan, and Blagojevich proposed the third \$30-million increase in a row for the Early Childhood Block Grant.

The report, gleaned from the governors' state of the state addresses, identified 20 governors nationwide who have recommended increased investment in pre-K programs—up from 11 governors last year. Read the report at www.preknow.org/documents/LeadershipReport.pdf. ■

More Evidence That Pre-Kindergarten Pays Off

A new study from the RAND Corporation provides evidence that preschool for all children is a wise investment. Among the findings: The state of California would reap an average of \$2.62 for every \$1 it invests in a public preschool program enrolling every 4-year-old in the state.

Unlike other studies showing a benefit primarily for disadvantaged children, this new one provides a window on the benefits of a universal approach. “Our analysis shows that an investment in universal preschool in California would provide a net economic benefit to the state,” said Lynn Karoly, senior economist at RAND and lead author of the report.

The study estimates that California would break even by the time a child reaches age 14, but continue to reap the benefits of the preschool investment for the rest of a child's life, since research shows the effects of a quality preschool education persist into adulthood. To download the study, visit www.rand.org. ■

Computers in the Classroom? Texas Finds Them Widespread Among 2- to 4-Year Olds

Educators have debated the use of computers in the classroom for nearly three decades, with many teachers worried the machines would turn children into little auto-

matons, passive and sedentary. Studies have yet to quell the controversy, though research has led educators to adopt some guidelines about their use. The National Asso-

ciation for the Education of Young Children, for example, cautions against programs that stereotype people or serve up violence. Yet NAEYC also acknowledges the benefits of computer use in the classroom, especially for children who may not have access to one at home. Several studies now document how children with disabilities can benefit from computers at school, as a way to boost their communication skills and relate to other children.

A new Texas study does not try to settle the controversies. Instead, the researchers set out to find out just how widely computers are used in licensed centers across the state, how center directors described the use and purpose of computers in the classroom—and which children tended to use computers most often.

The results? The majority of the 257 centers who responded did have computers

on-site, usually one computer for about 20 students or more. Thus, the computers tended to be used in learning centers, and most often, according to the directors, to extend concepts taught in the classroom. The directors also reported that all students, ages 2 to 4, used the computers regularly, regardless of socio-economic status or gender. That, the researchers concluded, suggests the classroom may provide a promising avenue for helping disadvantaged children gain computer skills.

To find out for sure, the researchers recommended that a national survey be conducted, to better track trends and understand the possible benefits—and drawbacks—of using computers in early education. To read the full study, “Computer Use In Preschools: Directors’ Reports of the State of the Practice,” visit www.ecrp.uiuc.edu/v6n2/lynch.html. ■



How to Stem Teacher Turnover? North Carolina Offers Solution

Plenty of research shows that the better a preschool program, the lower the turnover among its teachers. Studies also show that better-qualified teachers tend to be more devoted to and stay with their jobs longer. That’s why North Carolina, through a system of incentives and rewards, has made boosting teachers’ education a big priority.

Now a new study confirms the wisdom of that strategy: Turnover at early learning centers dropped to 24 percent, from 31 percent two years into the state’s expansion of the T.E.A.C.H. program, which provides early childhood teachers with scholarships to take college courses

and higher compensation as their qualifications improve.

The number of teachers with a 2- or 4-year-degree also rose, from 22 to 28 percent. Most dramatic of all, according to principal investigator Donna Bryant, was a 67 percent increase in the number of teachers with a 2-year degree. Many states already support T.E.A.C.H., but the new study by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute is one of the first to study the real-life effects and document its impact on turnover. The full report is available at www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncnr_assessment/pdfs/NC2003WFRReport.pdf. ■



State Budget Season Yields Some Wins For Pre-K Despite Tough Choices

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health insurance because of pre-K. We are proposing use of lottery money, not Medicaid money. It is completely separate.”

In other states, progress also unfolded that advanced the cause of early education for 3- and 4-year-olds. Massachusetts moved a step closer toward the Legislature’s stated goal of high-quality early education for all 3- and 4-year-olds, with the naming of top officials to head a new state department of early childhood education (see page 7 for more on this). Governor Tom Vilsack of Iowa also put early childhood education at the top of his state’s agenda, proposing a \$39 million expansion of early education services. In late March, the state House approved a \$12 million plan that Vilsack’s aides described as a “good start” on a coordinated, high-quality system for the state.

In other states, public preschool also garnered a key spot in state budget debates. In Illinois, for example, activists, policymakers, lawmakers and the governor all agreed that a planned expansion of public preschool—adding slots for up to 7,000 4-year-olds this year—should take place, even though debate over how to finance the expansion remained heated. The governor and many lawmakers favored using casino gambling taxes, but a broad coalition of early educators and social service advocates argued such taxes create too heavy a burden on low-

income and working class families. They lobbied for use of general state revenues instead.

In Arkansas, early childhood advocates and policymakers lobbied heavily for both a new investment of general revenue funds—up to \$30 million—as well as expansion of the state’s beer tax. The beer tax was created and earmarked for preschool several years ago, and one bill that appeared to be gaining speed would double that tax. Behind the scenes, a long-running school finance lawsuit created pressure on state officials to expand preschool, but the outcome was not certain. Still, many remained hopeful. “I truly believe we will win on the beer tax,” says Terry Baker, a leading lobbyist for early education. “I think we’ll win at least \$14.5 million in new funds, even if we don’t win all the general revenue we want.”

In other states, rising Medicaid costs cast a long shadow over budget negotiations, making it hard to secure funds for anything else. In New York State, for example, Medicaid spending accounted for about 40 percent of the state budget, twice the amount in most others. Lawmakers left new investment for the state’s universal prekindergarten program on hold, at least for this year.

But even in that state, policymakers now endorse early education as a public good and advocates held out hope that the program would expand sooner rather than



Many states are working to increase funding for early education programs despite tight budgets.

later. A school finance lawsuit now includes a claim for preschool and a state court has ordered the state to give New York City over \$5 billion more in school aid. The case is on appeal, but New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has already proposed using a chunk of it to expand the city’s public preschool effort, offering a full-day to 4-year-olds and a half-day to 3-year-olds. “There’s no doubt that there’s growing support for preschool,” says Stephanie Clothier, who follows policies on children and families for the National Council on State Legislatures. “But the budgets are still so tight that the choices are tough.”

The most ambitious expansion in the nation took off in Los Angeles this spring, as officials there took advantage of hundreds of millions of dollars raised from a statewide tobacco tax to

launch a preschool program open to every 4-year-old in L.A. county. “This is a great day for the children of Los Angeles,” said Rob Reiner, actor/producer, who led the campaign for the tobacco tax and is now chairman of First 5 California, the statewide organization which oversees use of the tobacco tax money. “By launching this effort to provide access to higher-quality preschools for thousands of children, First 5 is helping to solve the preschool crisis that exists in this county and state.”

While many policymakers might say the crisis exists around the nation, this year at least, there’s some progress toward reaching the goal of quality early education for all children. ■

Rural Education Takes Center Stage in Nebraska Lawsuit with Preschool Claim

Coalition of Educators Challenges Lack of Funding, Poor Preparation of Students
Non-English Speakers, Poor Facilities Contribute to Pervasive Problems

The scenario is a familiar one in urban school districts: Public school buildings are crumbling, with a few in such bad shape they've been condemned. The number of non-English speaking students grows each year, coinciding with the growth in immigrant families with few economic resources. Businesses that once sustained communities are long-gone, the local tax base is eroding and local property owners balk at the ever-rising cost of public education.

This isn't urban America—it's Nebraska, and rural Nebraska at that. "The area has changed dramatically, and most people outside the state are surprised when they hear about the problems our rural schools face, who our students are and the lack of resources we have," says Milford Smith, a retired school superintendent who worked in Nebraska's schools for more than four decades.

The area changed as family farms closed and the meat-packing industry left Omaha for the low taxes and ready labor in rural areas. Workers from Mexico and Asia now flock to the meat-packing plants, and their children to local schools. The breakneck pace of change dwarfs that in most big cities. "Many of these districts have

gone from 2 percent minority enrollment to 30 or 40 percent in the last decade," says Jerry Johnson, education consultant to the Rural Trust. "There are completely new challenges for the public schools."

These are challenges Smith and a team of advocates argue the state has yet

to meet, which is why a coalition of 34 rural school districts across the state decided to sue state officials, charging the state is failing to grant children their constitutional right to an adequate education—an education, they argue, that must include preschool. "Early childhood education, that is, preschool

and kindergarten, are necessary components of public education today," says Smith. "Our state board of education now recognizes that, and we included it in our lawsuit."

The case, *Nebraska Coalition for Equity and Adequacy v. Johanns*, echoes claims in other school finance cases pending across the nation, which argue the state has not provided enough money to local districts to satisfy children's right to an adequate public education. It is only one of a handful, however, to include a claim for preschool funding. "This case is particularly important to watch," says Ellen Boylan, executive director of Starting At 3, a nonprofit dedicated to creating a legal right to public preschool for all children. "It includes a claim for preschool, and it makes the case for that claim in a new context, in rural schools."

The coalition was awaiting court action as *Preschool Matters* went to press, but its members argued that even if they lost the first round, the legal action helped win critical attention to the plight of the nation's rural schools. "Rural schools have always been a stepchild in the discourse over school reform, but they face enormous challenges," says Johnson. "It's time to start a real dialogue about them, and to bring creativity, new resources and new thinking to make sure that their students get the support they need." ■



In a Nebraska school finance case rural school districts argue that "adequate education" must include preschool.

Elders at Assisted-Living Center Help Youngsters with Literacy Skills

Intergenerational Center Boosts Reading, Social Skills at Oklahoma Public Pre-K

Ice cream socials are not out of fashion for youngsters enrolled in public preschool classes at West Elementary in Jenks, Oklahoma. Nor are daily encounters with folks aged 75, 85, and more. That's because they attend class right on the campus of the Grace Living Center, a local nursing home, which also includes an ice cream shop, indoor park and playground for the kids.

It's an unusual partnership between the Jenks school district and the local nursing home chain, one that educators, parents and elder care experts alike endorse as mutually beneficial for old and young alike. "This project has been near and dear to my heart," says Diane Bosworth, assistant superintendent for elementary curriculum in Jenks. "The partnership enriches little children's lives and gives more of a purpose to the older people's lives."

The project started at the initiative of Don Greiner, owner of the home, who noticed the district already had an early childhood program near a nursing home he had just acquired. He immediately approached the district about a partnership. "He had noticed the wave of excitement in nursing homes when children come in to visit grandparents," Bosworth said. "Those visits breathed life into the home. He wondered if we couldn't partner

in some way—and he made us an offer that was hard to refuse. He offered to renovate two classrooms for us, and give us the space for \$1 a year, if the district would pay utilities."

That was in 1998. A myriad of details had to be worked out, including a round of community meetings and approvals by the local school board. Several concerns emerged in the community, including whether nursing home employees would be carefully screened, whether children might be exposed to diseases—or whether the children might expose the elderly to infections or illness.

The district, in cooperation with Greiner, addressed each concern, and came up with solutions that appealed to the community. All nursing home employees go through extensive background checks, and a liaison person at the home works with teachers and West Elementary's principal to plan all the interactions between the children and the elderly residents, for the safety and health of both.

Much of the day, the children play in the park and on the jungle gym, with their older friends watching just on the other side of a huge floor-to-ceiling glass window. But every day, the children and older folks read together, do arts projects or just chat, in a special activity designed by the teachers and integrated



Bridging the generation gap, seniors in Oklahoma are helping preschoolers learn to read.

into the curriculum.

The activities related to literacy have been particularly successful, according to Sandi Tilton, principal at West Elementary. "This program allows us to have more one-on-one reading time with each preschool child," she says. "It gives the children a chance to read, and to be read to." The initial results are promising. "Our kindergarten teachers tell us they can tell the difference in the children who attend the intergenerational program. Their reading is more advanced," she says.

The program is also popular among the parents, prompting the district to 'loop' the pre-K students into a kindergarten class at the same site. "We've had par-

ents tell us that this program is like having surrogate grandparents," says Tilton. "In this age of mobility, that's important to a lot of families who don't have grandparents nearby."

Surrogate grandparents or not, Tilton and Bosworth say the social and emotional pay-off from the program, the sort of adult relationships that encourage learning, are blooming at the center. "All you have to do is walk by and see a child climb into a lap of one of the residents—sometimes into wheelchairs—and ask to read a book, and you know we have something good happening here," says Bosworth. For more information, e-mail Bosworth at diane.bosworth@jenksps.org. ■

Stephen Raudenbush: How NCLB Testing Can Leave Some Schools Behind

Stephen Raudenbush, professor of education and statistics and research professor at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, is one of the nation's leading authorities on school testing. In a lecture at the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, N.J., Raudenbush offered an in-depth critique of current methods for measuring the school effectiveness.



Raudenbush suggests the current testing required by the Federal 'No Child Left Behind' Act not only misses the mark, but is 'scientifically indefensible' as a measure of a school's impact. Since such testing has already had broad impact on the field of early education, we invited him to share some of his findings here. The full text of his ETS lecture can be found at www.ets.org/research/pic/angoff9.pdf.

Q. What caused you to question the tests required by the No Child Left Behind Act?

A. Researchers have known

for many years that the average test score of a school is strongly correlated to the social and ethnic background of the community where it is located, and to the social and ethnic background of the families of the children. So that score tells you almost nothing about how good a school is. We've known that for many years.

Q. So the current tests are not a good way to judge how good a job a school is doing?

A. It's scientifically indefensible to use the average achievement test scores of a school for that purpose. We need to know how much kids are learning, not just how much they know. That's a separate issue. As I said, how well a child scores on an achievement test is highly correlated to that child's social and ethnic background—and relative privilege or lack of it. So schools serving higher numbers of poor children tend to have lower scores. But those scores do not always reflect the rate of learning going on at the school. That's the part we have to be very careful about.

Q. Why is that? It just sounds so logical to link children's scores on achievement tests with whether a school is doing a good job.

A. Yes, it sounds *logical*, until you consider that achievement tests were never meant to measure what goes on in a school. If you want to measure what goes on in a school,

you have to develop measures that look at the educational process and practices, not just at children's relative achievement. Many schools have reasonably good rates of growth in learning, but these schools might still have high percentages of children with low test scores. That's because they are dealing with large numbers of poor children, who may not score as well on achievement tests. In such cases, we don't want to disrupt those schools. They are good schools, with sound educational practices that promote learning, but still have lower achievement scores because of the large number of poor children attending that school. We don't want to judge them as failing and in need of improvement. In other schools, children have not only low average achievement but also poor rates of learning. These are the schools we need to worry about.

Q. Is that happening under the No Child Left Behind Act?

A. Well, we do know that large numbers of schools in poor, urban neighborhoods have been judged to need improvement. In fact, the overall pattern emerging is that schools serving high poverty communities are more likely to be judged as ineffective.

Q. Still, if achievement scores are low, shouldn't we hold

the schools accountable? Aren't schools responsible for helping all children to learn?

A. Of course, no child should go to a bad school. None of us want that. But the point is that the tests do not measure how good the educational practices are at a given school and the relative rates of learning. If the goal is to make better schools, then we need to have systems of accountability that help schools do a better job. The current law does not do that because the tests don't measure either the educational practices or the rate of learning.

Q. If that's the case, how did achievement tests become part of federal law?

A. Well, everyone agrees that children shouldn't go to schools that are doing a bad job, and it's easy to make a leap between the idea that how students do on achievement tests reflects practices at a particular school. In fact, the idea of using student achievement tests in this way has been popular since at least the mid-1980's, in different states, different localities, even different countries.

Q. Many researchers agree with your analysis. Haven't they protested?

A. Many have objected to this use of the tests. Some have suggested alternatives. There are some accountability systems that use a "value-added"

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Stephen Raudenbush: How NCLB Testing Can Leave Some Schools Behind

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approach, that is, they try to hold schools accountable for how much children learn while under the care of a particular school—the value that school adds to learning. That approach has been around for at least 10 years, and most recently, interest in this approach has exploded, because of the dissatisfaction with accountability based on average achievements.

Q. Does that mean we should switch to value-added testing?

A. If we use both pieces of information, we'd certainly do better. If we could identify schools with low test scores and low rates of learning, then we could separate these schools from those with higher rates of learning. We'd be a lot better off. There are some states and districts that do use both kinds of information now.

Q. So is that a good enough system for rating schools?

A. We need a system that follows the same children over time, or groups within a school. Usually all we have are average test scores from schools. We don't even know if it's the same kids year after year. We may also be missing information about minority groups within a school. Subgroups within a school must reach a certain size before their test scores are visible. So a school may do well on average, but students within a subgroup may not be doing well. That could be missed, especially at schools that have a more diverse student body. They are not held accountable for how all the different subgroups of kids are doing.

Q. So how can we judge how good a school really is?

A. We need to do more to identify effective practices in schools, and learn how to promote those practices, to improve the rate of learning among all students. There's tremendous interest in this

right now, and that's actually a very positive feature of the current situation. The upset over the current testing is motivating people to think more about this, about what effective practices are and what incentives we can create so that educators will adopt those practices.

"We need to measure practice and combine that knowledge with measurement of how rapidly children are learning."

Q. Is all of this relevant to preschool education?

A. Absolutely. In some ways, you have the best examples in preschool education. Certain kinds of intervention have proved to be very effective, and they are tied to specific practices. The High/Scope Foundation's research, for example, shows that certain practices make a difference.

Teaching language in certain ways can make a critical difference in children's learning. Those practices can be used in many settings to encourage learning.

Q. So you think we need to shift the spotlight from achievement to classroom practice?

A. Educational practices have to be at the heart of it. That's critical. And we need the resources to do more research to find out more about what practices work. We have to really know what to do to create the settings to help children learn. Then we can understand what is essential to reorganizing the delivery of instruction so that children will learn. We can't leave children in dysfunctional settings, but it would be an error to disrupt those where learning rates are high. That's the central point. We need to measure practice and combine that knowledge with measurement of how rapidly children are learning. ■

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